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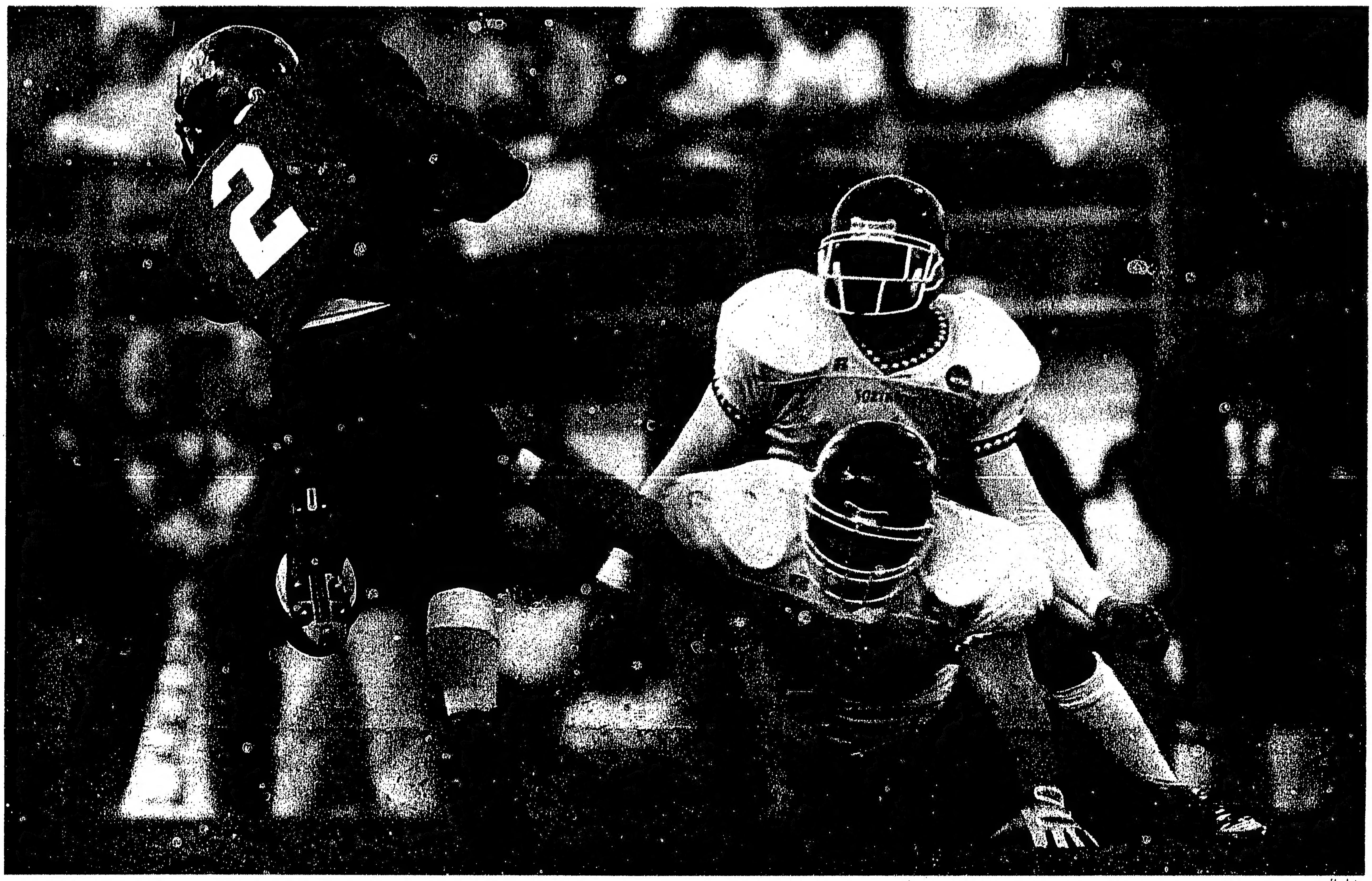

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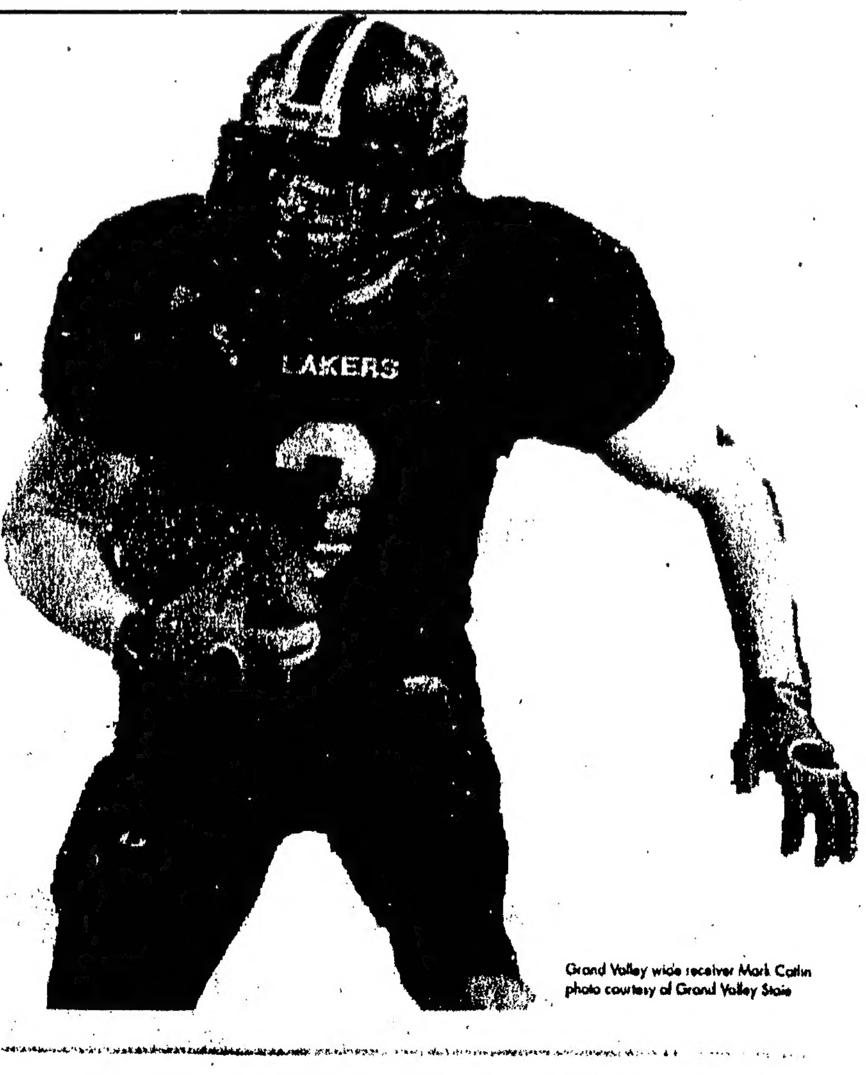
Northwest hopes to avoid falling to Grand Valley...again

Division II National Championship
No. 2 Northwest (14-0) vs. No. 1 Grand Valley State (14-0)

Northwest's Thomas Smith
photo by bobby taylor
assistant photographer

When:
Saturday, Dec. 16 11 a.m.
Where:
Braly Municipal Stadium,
Florence, Ala.
Coverage:
ESPN2, KXCV, 90.5 FM



Grand Valley wide receiver Mark Catlin
photo courtesy of Grand Valley State

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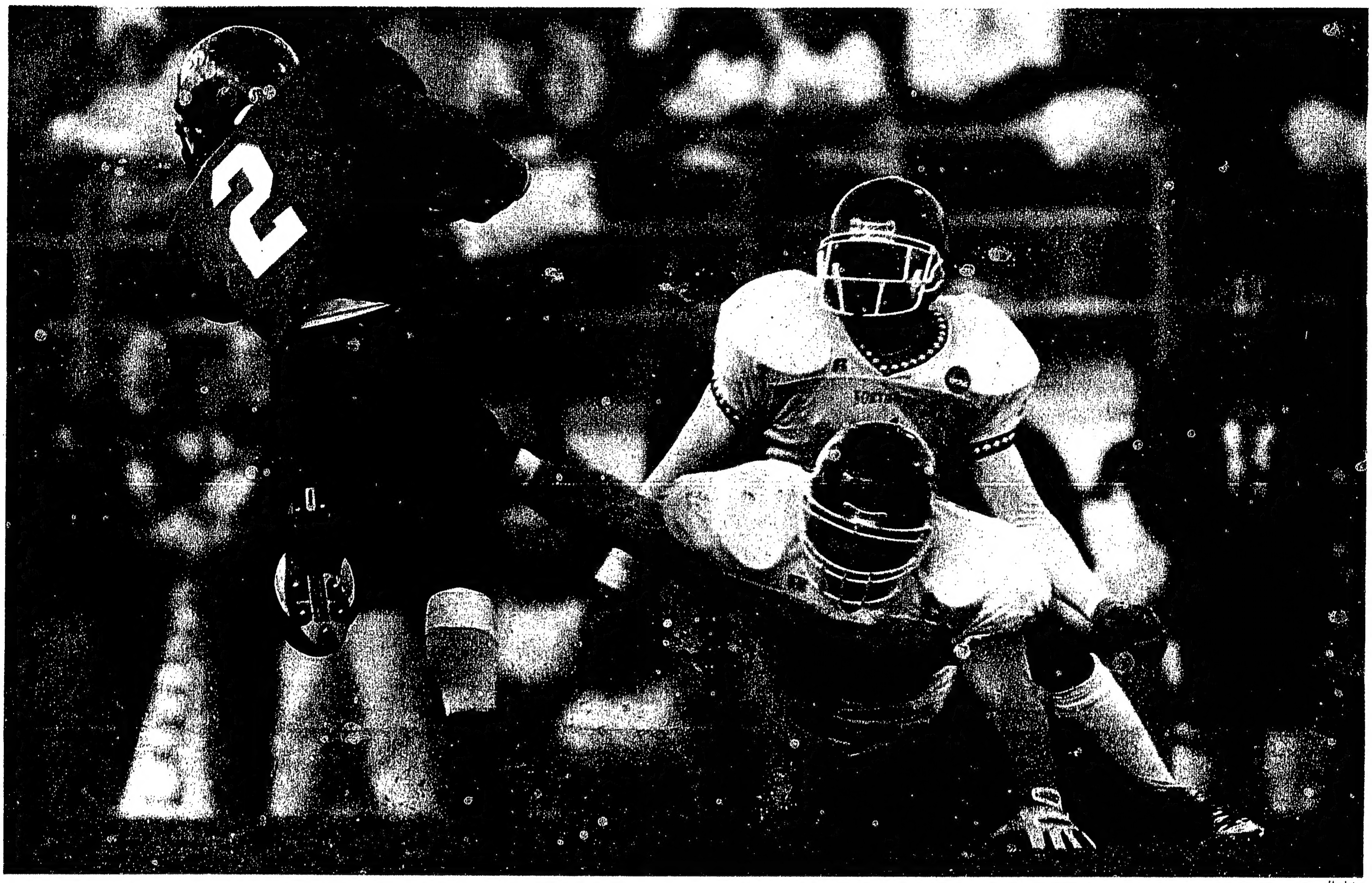

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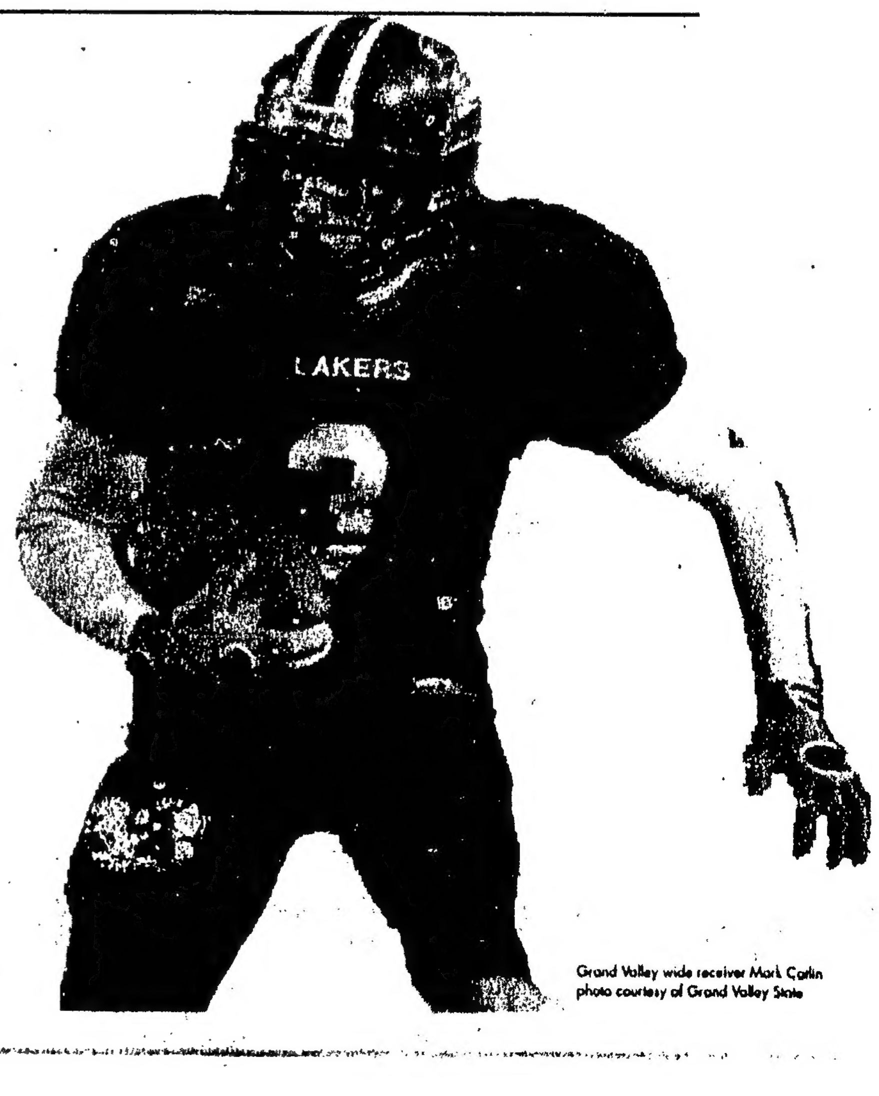

Grand Valley wide receiver Mark Carlin
photo courtesy of Grand Valley State

Have we met before?

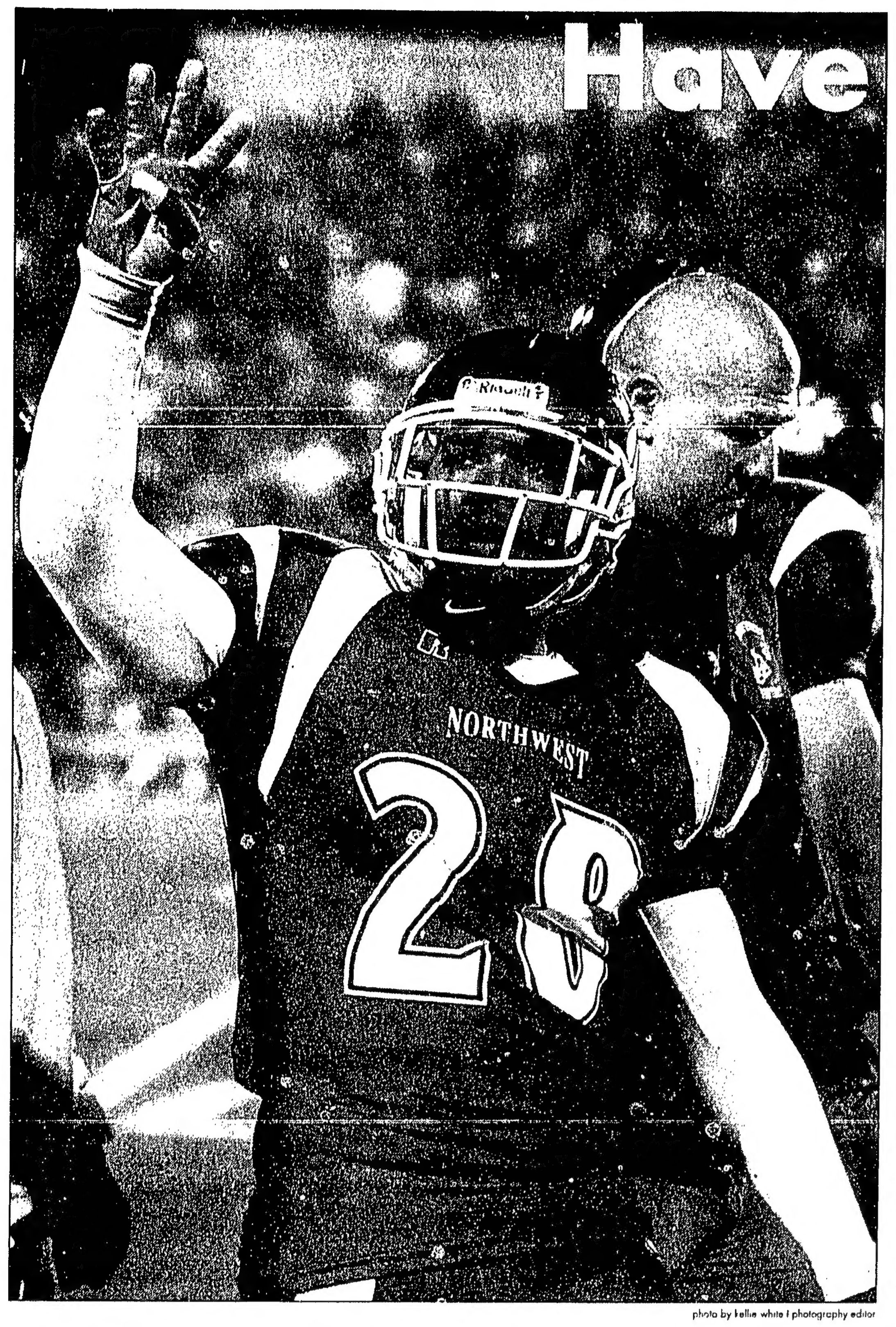

photo by kellie white I photography editor

CORNERBACK CHRIS LeFlore puts up four fingers Sunday, signifying the beginning of the fourth quarter. LeFlore and the 'Cats are also headed to their fourth national championship in school history.

Brett Barger
Assistant Sports Editor

After Northwest players walked off the field in last year's national championship loss, they completed a historical playoff march.

After sneaking into the playoffs, the Bearcats won four consecutive road playoff games, setting up a David vs. Goliath match up with undefeated Grand Valley State.

With a win Saturday at Braly Municipal Stadium in Florence, Ala., Northwest will become Goliath.

A rematch, 14 games in the making will occur when No. 2 Northwest meets No. 1 Grand Valley State Saturday for the Division II National Championship.

"Not very many people get second chances and this is our second chance," said senior defensive end Ryan Waters. "It's our last go around...we can't let this one go."

Quarterback Josh Mathews said he is looking forward to his first championship start. Through Northwest's first three playoff games, Mathews has thrown for 713 yards and four touchdowns. Last year, Mathews backed up Josh Lamberson.

"It's what every kid dreams of... it's really an indescribable feeling," Mathews said. "To be honest with you, it really hasn't sunk in that that's where we're headed (National Championship)."

Northwest (14-0) skated through the Division II playoffs allowing 24 total points, while keeping in check one of three Harlon Hill trophy finalists. In the quarterfinal round, they held prolific NCAA rusher Danny Woodhead to a career low 16 yards. During the regular season, the Bearcats held Pittsburg State running back Germaine Race, another Harlon Hill finalist, to 68 yards.

In order to complete the trifecta, the defense looks to shut down Grand Valley quarterback Cullen Finnerty.

"He (Finnerty) throws a good ball, but he really is going to hurt us with his feet, so we've got to contain him," Waters said.

This season, Finnerty has thrown for 40 touchdowns and has seven rushing touchdowns. In last year's title game, Finnerty had two rushing touchdowns and a passing touchdown, which proved to be the game-winner.

"He's really stepped up his game to a whole new level," Grand Valley coach Chuck Martin said. "He takes a lot of pride in being the leader of our offense and being the leader of our football team."

Northwest coach Mel Tjeerdsma said it's hard to gauge whether Grand Valley, which has won 27 straight games, is better than the team his Bearcats faced last year.

"They're as balanced as they were last year," Tjeerdsma said. "I think they're passing game is a little more potent this year and (Cullen) Finnerty is a senior and he's their guy."

Finnerty has spread the ball well this year, but his favorite target has been Eric Fowler. Fowler leads the team with 76 catches for 1,598 yards and 21 touchdowns.

Fowler, who finished with two catches in last year's game, said Northwest's ability to sub in different players will make his job difficult.

"I've seen a bunch of players. They got about eight or nine guys that they rotate in that corner. It's kind of hard to tell who's playing when or who's starting. They got a bunch of athletes."

Grand Valley's defense gives up 15.6 points per game and is led by Michael McFadden. McFadden is a Gene Upshaw Award finalist, which honors the top lineman in Division II football. He enters the championship with 7.0 sacks and 12.5 tackles for loss. McFadden is joined on the defensive line by Derrick Jones who leads the team in sacks with 9.5. Defensive back Brandon Carr leads the Lakers with five interceptions.

"Their front's really good. They're going to be the best front we've faced all year and not just big, but straight quickness," Tjeerdsma said.

Prior to Grand Valley State's semifinal win against Delta State, the Laker offense had scored 10 second half points in it's first two games. Against Delta State, Grand Valley scored in every quarter.

"We're just trying to hit that stride," Finnerty said.

Martin said after the Lakers victory over Delta State on ESPN2 that "there's not a defense in the nation that can stand up to us right now." When asked about the comment, Waters said the team will go out and do their job.

"We haven't done that all year. We don't play football with our mouth," Waters said.

NORTHWEST CENTER Jordan Wilcox consoles running back Xavier Omon minutes after their loss to Grand Valley State in the 2005 national championship game in Florence, Ala. The 'Cats meet the Lakers once again for the NCAA Division II National Championship Saturday at Braly Municipal Stadium in Florence.

file photo

BEARCAT I LAKER STATISTICS

SCORING
Northwest 35.4
Grand Valley 36.9

SCORING DEFENSE
Northwest 11.1
Grand Valley 15.6

PASSING YARDS PER GAME
Northwest 239.1
Grand Valley 225.7

PASS DEFENSE
Northwest 169.0
Grand Valley 200.0

RUSHING YARDS PER GAME
Northwest 172.6
Grand Valley 168.4

RUSHING DEFENSE
Northwest 71.9
Grand Valley 97.4

SACKS-YARD LOST
Northwest 39-280
Grand Valley 52-296

SACKS ALLOWED-YARDS LOST
Northwest 18-107
Grand Valley 21-141

FIRST DOWNS
Northwest 300
Grand Valley 269

TIME OF POSSESSION PER GAME
Northwest 31:35
Grand Valley 30:24

OPPONENT'S TIME OF POSSESSION
Northwest 28:25
Grand Valley 29:36

PASSING LEADERS
Josh Mathews- 231-349, 3136 yards, 23 TD's, 6 INT's Northwest
Cullen Finnerty 180-310, 2995 yards, 40 TD's, 10 INT's Grand Valley

RUSHING LEADERS
Xavier Omon- 317 carries, 1389 yards, 21 TD's, 115.8 YPG Northwest
Astin Martin- 212 carries, 1076 yards, 8 TD's, 76.9 YPG Grand Valley

RECEIVING LEADERS
Northwest
Kendall Wright- 75 catches, 1066 yards, 5 TD's, 76.1 YPG
E.J. Falkner- 56 catches, 691 yards, 3 TD's, 49.4 YPG
Mike Peterson- 34 catches, 497 yards, 5 TD's, 35.5 YPG
Raphael Robinson- 30 catches, 488 yards, 3 TD's, 34.9 YPG

Grand Valley
Eric Fowler- 76 catches, 1598 yards, 21 TD's, 114.1 YPG
Antione Trent- 29 catches, 332 yards, 6 TD's, 23.7 YPG
Terry Mitchell- 28 catches, 500 yards, 9 TD's, 38.5 YPG
Blake Smolen- 19 catches, 222 yards, 1 TD, 18.5 YPG

DEFENSIVE LEADERS
Northwest
Thomas Smith- 82 Tackles, 57 Solo, 3.5 Sacks, 1 INT, 2 Forced Fumbles
Jared Erspamer- 67 Tackles, 45 Solo, 2.0 Sacks, 2 INT's, 2 Recovered Fumbles
Ben Harness- 51 Tackles, 36 Solo, 3.0 Sacks
Ryan Waters- 51 Tackles, 29 Solo, 7.0 Sacks

Grand Valley
Anthony Adams- 83 Tackles, 38 Solo, 1.5 Sacks, 2 Forced Fumbles
P.J. Beuke- 72 Tackles, 29 Solo, 4.0 Sacks, 1 Recovered Fumble
Jacob McGuckin- 68 Tackles, 37 Solo, 2 INT's,
Derrick Jones- 61 Tackles, 24 Solo, 9.5 Sacks, 3 Forced Fumbles

KICKING
Northwest
Tommy Frevert- 14/23 FG, 9/11 20-29 yards, 3/9 30-39 yards, 2/3 40-49 yards, 63/65 PAT's
Todd Carter- 9/12 FG, 5/5 20-29 yards, 3/4 30-39 yards, 1/3 40-49 yards, 63/69 PAT's

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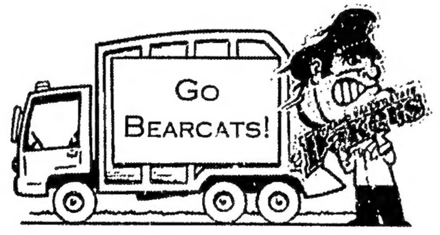

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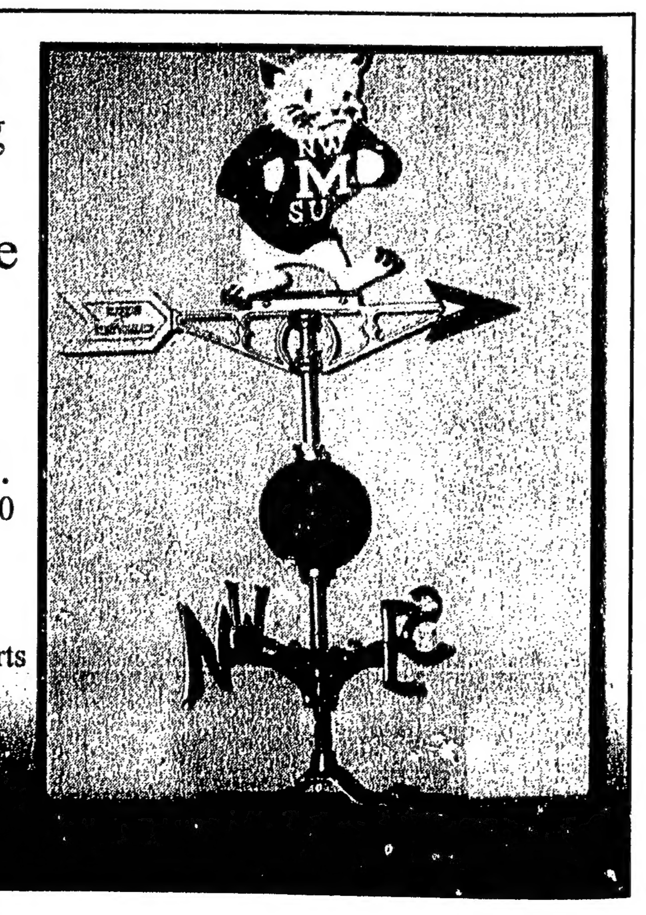

Taking care of business

Brett Barger
Assistant Sports Editor

photo by kellie white I photography editor

SENIOR KYLE Kaiser, right, sits at ninth best in the nation with 12.5 tackles for loss this season. As a former Northwest walk-on, Kaiser has made his way up the depth chart and is looked at as one of the top defenders in the MIAA.

Before a game, Northwest senior nose tackle Kyle Kaiser chews two pieces of bubble gum.

On every road trip, he wears the same hat..

As No. 2 Northwest prepares for its national championship rematch with No. 1 Grand Valley State, don't expect Kaiser to drop his routine, which he has kept since his sophomore year of high school.

"I'm pretty bad with superstitions," Kaiser said.

As his college football career comes to a close, Kaiser's journey from walk-on to all-conference performer has been about proving the doubters wrong.

Coming out of high school in Elkhorn, Neb., Kaiser's 6-foot frame did not make him a hot prospect at defensive tackle. After being recruited by Northwest coach Mel Tjeerdsma, Kaiser worked hard to make the team as a walk-on.

"He was a good high school player, but the concern we had was his height," Tjeerdsma said. "Because of that, we probably didn't see what kind of player he was going to be."

After starting out as defensive end, Kaiser picked up 20 pounds and moved to nose tackle, where he flourished. Kaiser finished the 2005 season third on the club in tackles (74) and tied for third in sacks (6.5). This season, Kaiser's tackles and sacks have dropped off considerably, but his 12.5 tackles for loss has helped the defense become the ninth best in the nation.

"He's definitely proved himself," Tjeerdsma said. "He never quits."

Last season, Kaiser sacked North Alabama quarterback Vinnie Saylor for a safety in last year's national semi-final. His play cut Northwest's deficit to five points, setting up their come from behind victory.

"It was awesome. Never before have I scored points in a football game, dating back to when I played in fourth grade," Kaiser said.

This season, during Northwest's 28-21 win over Chadron State in the quarterfinal round, Kaiser's seven tackles were part of a defense that held prolific NCAA rusher Danny Woodhead to 16 yards.

His performance was so good that Chadron coach Bill O'Boyle made it a point to single out Kaiser's performance during the post-game press conference.

"That No. 58 (Kaiser) controlled the game," O'Boyle said. "He just stuffed the line."

Kaiser is not quick to give praise to himself, but is very quick to credit the other members of the defensive line.

"I'm definitely not used to getting that type of recognition...but our whole defense had a great day," Kaiser said.

After finishing Honorable Mention All-MIAA his sophomore and junior year, Kaiser was rewarded with a first team selection—a selection that Tjeerdsma said was long overdue.

"Kyle Kaiser is the most underrated defensive player in our conference. I'll guarantee you that," Tjeerdsma said.

Kaiser's interest in Northwest came after watching the Bearcats win the 1998 and '99 national championships. It was Northwest's sustained success and national coverage that made Kaiser sign with Northwest.

"A lot of it had to do with watching them (Northwest) on TV in '98 and '99. I really didn't know who they (Northwest) were at the time," Kaiser said. "That's something, coming out of high school, that everyone wants to be, not only conference champions, but national champions."

Kaiser's younger brother, Brett, finished his freshman season as an offensive lineman for the Bearcats. Although Brett's duties were relegated to the scout team, Kyle said it gave him a chance to get closer to Brett.

"I like it because I never really got to be as close to him as I was my older brother," Kaiser said. "Now that I get to be a little closer to him, I can kind of find out what he's really about."

As Kaiser and the rest of the Bearcats prepare for their second consecutive national championship game appearance, Kaiser said there is potential for the team to do great things.

"I think we knew that we had the chance to be this good," Kaiser said. "We lost the game in Alabama and I think that our team's done a great job of never letting down."

BY NUMBERS

13.5 Tackles for loss

1 Number of All-Conference selections

2 Number of Honorable Mention All-Conference selections

3 Sacks on the season

6 Kaiser's height in feet

Northwest Athletics wants to congratulate Coach Tjeersdma on being a Liberty Mutual Coach of the Year Finalist!
GO BEARCATS!
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Miraculous Mel

Northwest coach took program from basement to national powerhouse

Jerome Boettcher
Sports Editor

It might be hard to believe, but Maryville wasn't always a football town.

"No, no, it was basketball," Northwest defensive coordinator Scott Bostwick said. "It was more of a basketball school."

In 1994, the football program didn't look to be headed up. After an 0-11 season there didn't seem to be much reason for hope.

But 13 seasons later, Northwest football is a nationally-prominent program.

Since 1996, the Bearcats have a compiled a record of 126-19, have been to four national championships, two-time national champions, have made trips to the Division II playoffs and have won or shared the conference title eight times.

The reason for this remarkable turnaround can be credited to one man—Mel Tjeerdsma.

South Dakota farm boy

Melvin Tjeerdsma was born in 1947 and lived on a farm near Springfield, S.D.

He was the youngest son and had five siblings. The next oldest sibling, his brother, was 11-years-old when Tjeerdsma was born and his parents were 40.

"I was kind of a tail-ender, kind of a surprise I think," Tjeerdsma said. "It was kind of like two families. I'm actually closer to my (three) brothers now I think than when I was growing up. There was nothing really we had in common at that time."

His father was a farmer but knew he didn't want to follow in his father's footsteps.

"I knew from the time I was really young, I didn't want to farm and I could have," Tjeerdsma said. "That's not what I wanted. I always just had passion for anything with sports."

However, despite not following his father's passion, Tjeerdsma never forgets what he learned from his father.

"My dad was very intent on what he was doing. He had a great work ethic; he was really a great man," Tjeerdsma said. "He was very honest. The values I got from my parents are really, really important to me...that was thing I really got from my dad, he never complained, whatever we had that was good, he always made the best of what we had."

Tjeerdsma went to Springfield High School and was a three-sport athlete—in football, basketball and track. While in high school Tjeerdsma said he idolized his coach of all three sports Jon Westling.

After graduating in 1964, he went to Southern State College in Springfield and graduated in 1967 with a degree in physical education.

Tjeerdsma married young, to Carol, and started working right away. He began coaching as an assistant high school football coach but got his first head coaching job at Sioux Center High School in 1972.

In his first season his team won the state championship and he was named the Northwest Iowa Coach of the Year honors.

"I thought it was pretty easy," Tjeerdsma said.

Along with coaching football, he coached track at Sioux Center High School and was named the Northwest Iowa Track and Field Coach of the Year three times.

In 1975, he coached at Denison High School in Iowa and went 9-0 and made it to the playoffs in just one season there.

While working on his master's degree in physical education at Northwest, Tjeerdsma was offered a job as the offensive coordinator at NAIA affiliated Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa.

Tjeerdsma spent eight years at Northwestern College and twice his offense led the nation in total offense and scoring. Northwestern also went to the playoffs four times and won the national championship in 1983.

He also was the head track coach at Northwestern and up until that point, Tjeerdsma was leaning towards being a track coach.

"I was a head track coach everywhere I was at until Denison and had really good success at track," Tjeerdsma said. "At one point I actually thought about try to going that route. But I really enjoyed football a lot at Northwestern when I was there offensive coordinator. I started to learn the game a little more and all the things that go with it."

In 1984, Tjeerdsma decided to take the head coaching job at Austin College in Sherman, Texas. He spent 10 years at Austin College (also NAIA) and said it was a different type of football in Texas.

"It's a totally different world, high school football was almost overwhelming," Tjeerdsma said. "...We had a 5A high school in Sherman, my first year in Sherman they were 0-10, and they still averaged 8 or 9,000 people a game. We won the conference that year and we could probably get 1,500 or 2,000 people. In Texas it's either high school football or big time football."

Tjeerdsma coached at Austin until 1993 and he compiled a 60-38-4 record, was the school's winningest all-time coach, won three conference titles and made it to the playoffs twice.

Northwest and "The Staff"

While working on his master's in the late 1970s at Northwest, Tjeerdsma met Jim Redd, who at the time was Northwest's football coach.

In 1994, Redd was Northwest's athletic director and decided to hire Tjeerdsma.

"I'm really proud of that," Redd said.

Tjeerdsma hired all of his staff but one. One staff member came over from the previous staff under Bud Elliott but Tjeerdsma hired his other three staff members.

Jim Svoboda, now the offensive coordinator at UCLA, played under Tjeerdsma at both Denison and Northwestern.

Svoboda didn't get hired at Nebraska-Omaha like he had hoped so Tjeerdsma hired him on as the offensive coordinator.

Tjeerdsma coached a running back by the name of Bart Tatum at Austin College and had always thought highly of Tatum. In the first spring,

see **MIRACULOUS** on **A5**

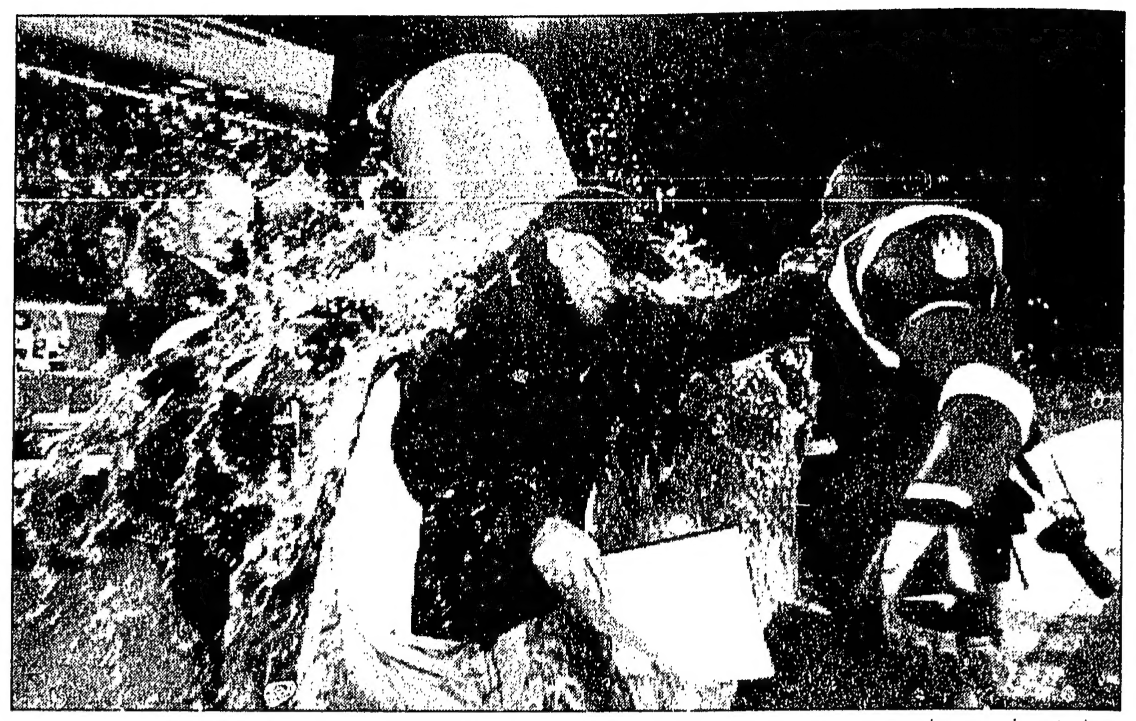

photo courtesy of university relations

MEL TJEERDSMA gets soaked by his players after winning Sunday at Bearcat Stadium. The win sent Tjeerdsma and the Bearcats to their fourth national championship--all have been in the Tjeerdsma era.

photo by kellie white | photography editor

MEL TJEERDSMA talks to his team at halftime Sunday. Those who know Tjeerdsma well say his work ethic, modesty and good-natured attitude has been the reason he's been successful. Tjeerdsma says it's because he's had good people around him, either way he's impacted the University and Maryville.

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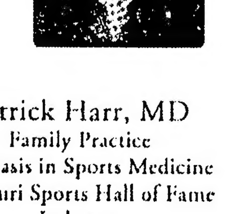
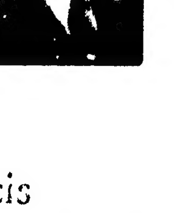
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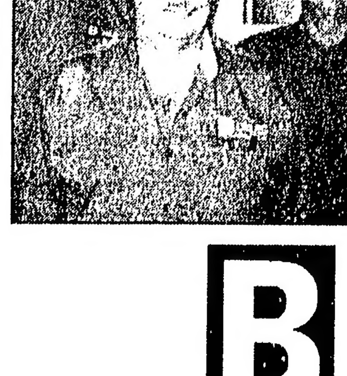
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MIRACULOUS: Coach builds program, legacy

continued from **A4**

he was the secondary coach and then after that he coached the offensive line until 2004 when Svoboda left for UCLA. Tatum took Svoboda's spot and just last December he was hired as the head coach of the Missouri Southern.

There was one spot left- defensive coordinator. Svoboda knew Scott Bostwick who was the defensive coordinator at Western Washington but coached alongside Svoboda at Nebraska-Wesleyan. Though Tjeerdsma had never met Bostwick, Svoboda highly recommended him and Tjeerdsma went along with him.

"After I met him, I really thought he could do the job," Tjeerdsma said.

Out of the people that started in 1994, Tjeerdsma and Bostwick are the only two left.

So Tjeerdsma had his staff.

"The fun part about football is you work with the staff," he said. "That to me is one of the real joys of coaching football, is to have your staff...you go to fight that battle every Saturday. We've been so fortunate here to have such a great staff all the time."

A woeful beginning

But after the 1994 season, his first season, Tjeerdsma was beginning to have second thoughts.

"I took the job, after I got it, after I was here a year, I thought I had made a serious mistake," he said.

The Bearcats went 0-11 in 1994. Those involved describe it as a tough season.

"We were just bad," Bostwick said. "There were two close games...but in the others we got our asses kicked."

But Tjeerdsma had hope. His team was practicing well despite being unsuccessful.

"Quite honestly, I thought we could turn this thing around, but I never dreamt that it would be what is now," Tjeerdsma said.

The turnaround

In 1995, the 'Cats went 6-5 and Tjeerdsma said they could have gone 8-3 if it wasn't for two close losses.

Part of the reason the team took a big step was because Tjeerdsma got rid of some of the troublemakers on the team.

Current offensive line coach and former Northwest player Adam Dorrel remembers Tjeerdsma telling his team after the 1994 season that he wanted good student athletes. Sure enough, those that didn't change their ways lost their scholarships.

"In my eyes that showed me he wasn't kidding and he was going to get it going," Dorrel said.

Then it happened.

Almost as if it was overnight, the football team got better--a lot better.

Northwest won their first 10 games of the 1996 season, shared the conference title and made it to the playoffs for the first time in 12 years. Northwest advanced to the second round before losing in the second round to Northern Colorado 27-26.

"After 1995, he said we're taking the next step and next year's our turn and we're going to the national playoffs," Dorrel said. "I was like a year ago, we were 0-11 and now we're talking about going to the playoffs and we did. That's just the way he (Tjeerdsma) is, he instilled that into people."

The following year Northwest won the conference championship but again fell to Northern Colorado in the second round.

Then in 1998, they couldn't lose. The 'Cats went 15-0 and won the first national championship of any sport in school history.

Tjeerdsma actually remembers the 1998 semifinal as being more exciting than the national championship partially because they clinched a trip to the title game in Maryville.

"To go 0-11 to 14-0 and see what happened out here, the goalpost come down and people going crazy that was a pretty incredible feeling," he said. "To me that was a lot more exciting than winning the national championship."

Then in 1999, they did it again and this time with a little drama.

Northwest overcame a two score deficit late in regulation to force overtime against Carson-Newman in the national championship. The game went four overtimes and Northwest finally won 58-52.

"I don't know if you ever can top that," he said. "We just never quit. The kids believed they were going to win some how, some way."

Didn't do it alone

So here Tjeerdsma is, seven years later, at it again. His team is headed back to its second straight title game but things are a little different.

The field has changed, the track has changed, the press box's bigger, the stadium's larger. And just last Sunday ESPN came to town and lights were on the premised for the first time in nearly three decades.

"It was pretty incredible," Tjeerdsma said. "You really do feel good about what's happened here."

But through it all Tjeerdsma remains humble.

A man strong in faith, Tjeerdsma believes everything happens for a reason and credits many for his road to the top.

Of course he thanks his staff, those who hired him, his players and all his those who believed in him. But most of all he credits his wife, Carol.

Carol teaches at Horace Mann Laboratory School while also working in real estate and raised their three daughters.

"She's made so many sacrifices," Tjeerdsma said. "She's been with me all my years of coaching...I've been blessed."

The impact

For the past two years, Northwest football been televised by ESPN twice. The economy was estimated to make $750,000 a home playoff game this season.

Thirteen years ago, none of this seemed possible but now, thanks to Tjeerdsma, Northwest and Maryville are on the map.

"This certainly has been the golden era of Northwest football which we will hope will continue for a long time," Northwest athletic director Bob Boerigter said. ". .(His) impact's been tremendous, tremendous."

Besides economical impact, Tjeerdsma has touched a lot of people. According to those who know him well, Tjeerdsma teaches everyday skills that will last forever.

"He's real tactful," Dorrel said. "That goes along ways in the world, again I don't care what you're doing. But if you can talk to people and voice your opinion in a civilized manner, even if it's different, but keeping everybody on the same page is something he's really good at doing."

Linebacker Ben Harness knows Tjeerdsma works hard and says it trickles down to his players.

"I think the thing that's made him so successful over the years is probably the hard work that he puts in and his commitment to football," Harness said.

Replacing a legend

Tjeerdsma's the president of the American Football Coaches Association, has been named the AFCA National Coach of the Year twice, has been honored as the MIAA Coach of the Year eight times and right now is up for the inaugural Liberty Mutual Coach of the Year Award.

And there's those national championships.

So whoever replaces Mel Tjeerdsma will have some big shoes to fill.

"That will not be an easy task," Boerigter said. "A lot of significant resources have been put in place so this program can continue to do well. If our university over the years had not supported the program overall we would not have been able to keep Mel Tjeerdsma as the head football coach."

There has been talk of renaming Bearcat Stadium, Tjeerdsma Stadium after the coach leaves. Boerigter says Tjeerdsma will be remembered in a gracious way but that won't measure him as a person.

"His greatest legacy is not that something is named after him," Northwest athletic director Bob Boerigter said. "His greatest legacy is that people or going to talk about him, reflect on him, reflect on what he's done."

Tjeerdsma said he right now he doesn't have any intentions of leaving Maryville but said he's not sure if it will be where his career will end.

He also said if Northwest won Saturday, retiring as a winner wasn't "in the remotest part of mind now."

He said retirement isn't in his mind at this time but doesn't seem himself coaching well into his 70s like Division I coaches Bobby Bowden and Joe Paterno.

"I'm certainly not ready to retire," Tjeerdsma said. "I feel like I can coach a long time...I think I got some good years left if I want to do it. But again that kind of goes back to my faith, I'll know what's right. Wherever I'm supposed to be, I'll be. Whatever I'm supposed to be doing, I'll be doing."

Overall, Tjeerdsma says the important thing is not what people remember about him but who remembers him.

"Not what I liked to remembered about but who I'd like to be remembered by," he said. "That's by my kids, my players. To see (my former players) on the sidelines...to get phone calls from former players and then they start to tell you about what they're doing. To me that's what it's all about."

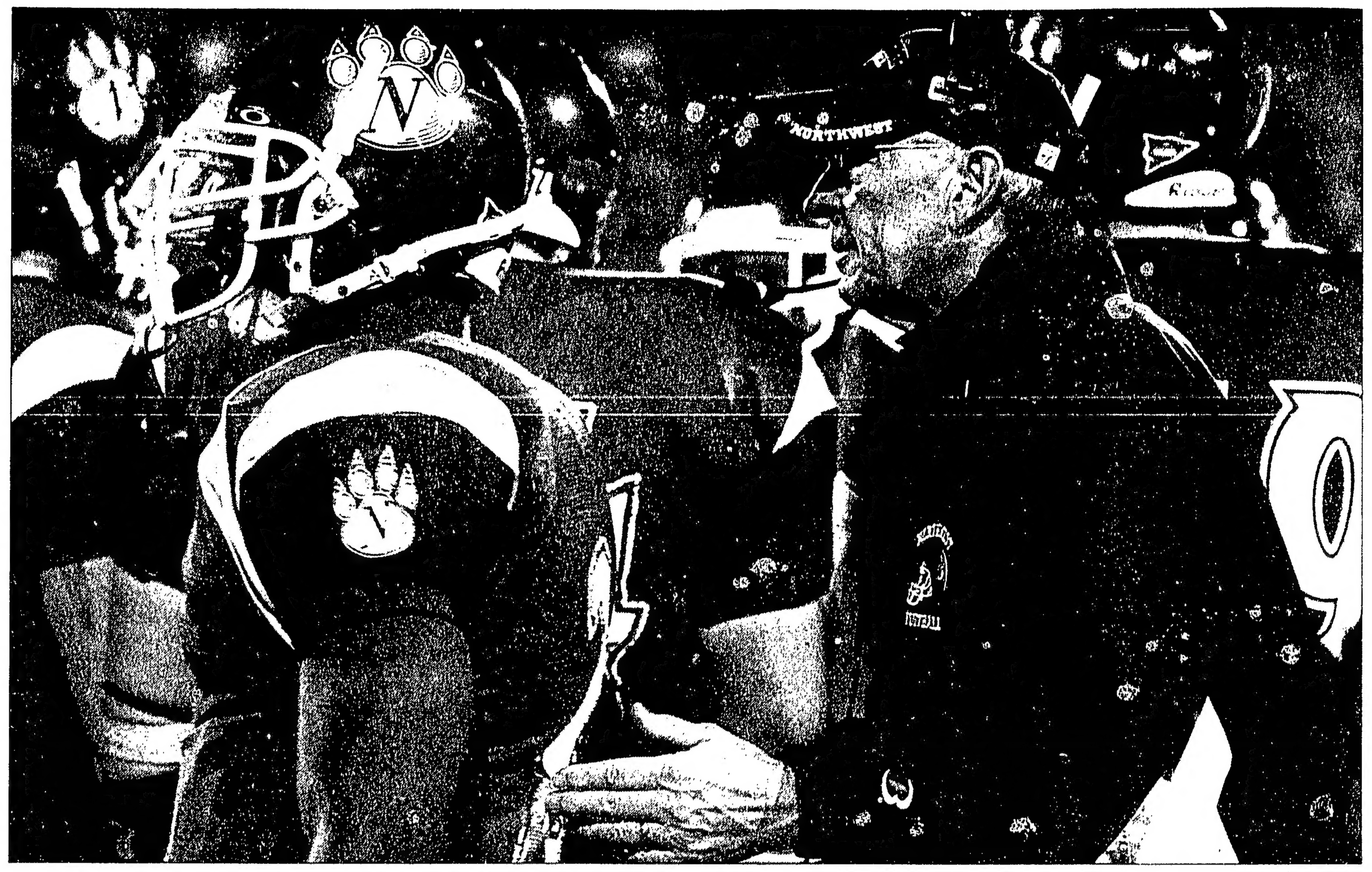

photo by kellie white | photography editor

NORTHWEST COACH Mel Tjeerdsma walks off the field with running back Xavier Omon after Northwest's 33-3 semifinal victory against Bloomsburg Sunday at Bearcat Stadium. Tjeerdsma is in his 13th season at Northwest and has compiled 126-19 record over the last 11 seasons after going o-11 in his first season as the head coach.

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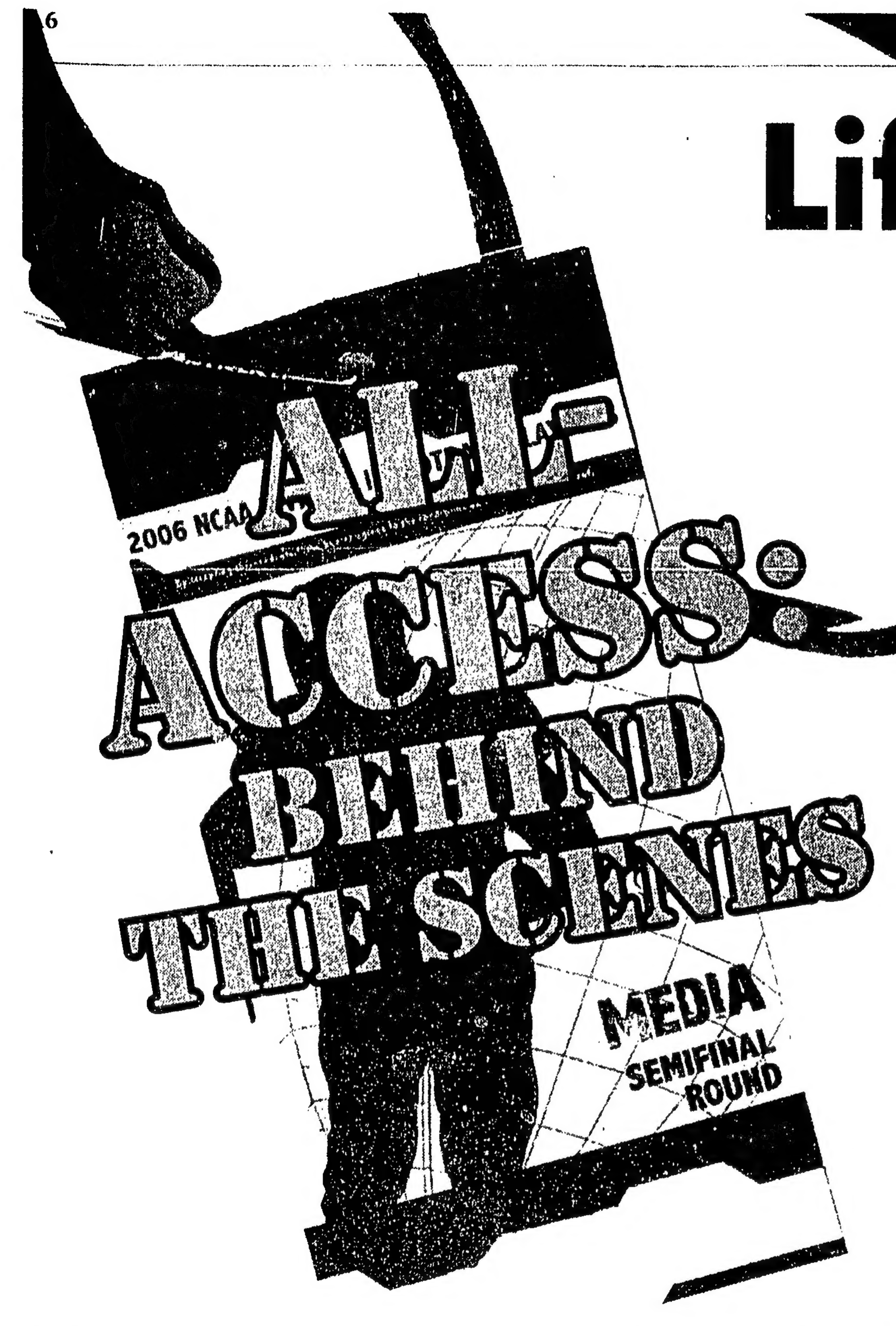

Life as a Bearcat

Jerome Boettcher
Sports Editor

Sunday could go d[...]s one of the most historic mome[...] Northwest athletics' history.

For the first ti[...]nce 1977, the Bearcats played a [...] game at home and for the first ti[...]er, ESPN was on campus to telev[...].

But most i[...]tantly of all the game was the fi[...]e since 1999 that Northwest h[...] a semifinal. Meaning it was t[...]t time in seven years that the Bearcats could clinch a title game birth in front of the home fans.

So on such a historic day, the *Northwest Missourian* decided to spend a day at Bearcat Stadium. The *Missourian* was there hours before the game, with access to locker rooms and coach and player meetings. Here's an inside peek from Dec. 10 at Bearcat Stadium.

8:30-10:30 a.m.

ESPN trucks and crew members begin to show up and set up equipment.

The highly-anticipated lights have been on campus since Friday. Two light standards, provided by MUSCO Lighting, stand on the student side of Bearcat Stadium stand 100-feet tall while the lights near the press box side reach as high as 120 feet.

Noon

Northwest football players pour into J.W.'s Grille at the Student Union on campus for the pre-game meal.

The team eats their sandwiches quickly most are done by 12:15.

Around that time, Northwest coach Mel Tjeerdsma gets in front of the team to go over the itinerary for the day.

Tjeerdsma's silver grey hair is slicked back and he dons his wide rimed glasses as usual. However, at this time, Tjeerdsma's attire is a little different than usual.

Tjeerdsma's suit jacket matches his hair while his dress shirt has a hint of mustard yellow. Tjeerdsma dons brown slacks as well as brown shoes.

"I was wondering why he was all dressed up," defensive coordinator Scott Bostwick says to another Northwest coach. "He just came from church. I forgot it was Sunday."

The extra day has obviously gotten to the team as most are anxious to play.

"If I could fast forward to 4:30 I would," Tjeerdsma tells his team. "Let's be ready to go."

The players scatter, most head back home because they don't have to report for team meetings for another two hours. Tjeerdsma sticks around and makes sure the cafeteria is clean, pushing in chairs and picking up trash before he heads back home as well.

12:35 p.m.

Back at the stadium, ESPN continues to set up. Only a few people are spread out around the stadium. Members of the sports information department get things set up in the press box but it seems like right now everyone is just waiting.

Though kickoff is four hours away, sign of life is apparent. A sign hangs from the stands on the press box side reading "Even Santa Picks Northwest."

1 p.m.

"Hell's Bells" blasts through the Northwest locker room.

Offensive lineman Joe Holtzclaw and defensive lineman Sean Paddock are the only two in the locker room.

Holtzclaw's IPOD is connected to the speakers and his legs shake as he looks over plays.

"I'm kind of ready to get out there, hurry up and go," Holtzclaw says.

Minutes later, tight end Mike Peterson and offensive lineman Kyle Dunn stroll in. Peterson, Holtzclaw and Paddock look at a chart that shows a mountain.

On each step of the mountain is the Bearcats previous opponents in the season. At the top of the mountain is a flag, and above it are the words National Championship.

1:25 p.m.

Holtzclaw makes his way onto the field and wonders around, still trying to kill time.

Meanwhile in Lamkin Activity Center, Tjeerdsma sits in his office looking over plays. Tjeerdsma's apparel is different than at lunch.

He wears a white polo, with a green under shirt, followed by khakis and green and white Nikes.

Friends and guests of the coaches fill the hallways. Tjeerdsma said usually this is the time, to relax and talk to visitors.

"It's more of a time to relax," Tjeerdsma said. "It's nice to have a little bit of time to yourself, peace and quiet."

Moments later Tjeerdsma rises from his seat to greet a couple of friends. Tjeerdsma's warm welcome is apparent and he reminisces for awhile.

Tjeerdsma's office looks out onto Bearcat Stadium—an office he's been in since 1995.

Trophies, plaques and pictures fill the room representing his legacy.

1:45 p.m.

Underneath Bearcat Stadium, 30-plus employees of ESPN gather for lunch.

At one table, a few Northwest alums sit. Ranging from 1983 to 2005 graduates, the freelancers for ESPN laugh and enjoy each other's company.

"I'm pretty tickled," Brad Pace, an 1983 graduate, says. "I've never felt this good about doing a show for a long time. It feels good."

Soon after the six alums gather in front of an ESPN truck and pose for a picture.

2:30 p.m.

Nearly 30 players, and a few coaches, cram inside a classroom in Martindale Hall.

Trevor Nashleanas leads the players as chapel begin. Nashleanas, a redshirt freshman wide receiver from Omaha, Neb., talks about being hungry not only for Sunday's game but for Jesus as well.

Chapel ends in prayer and the players shuffle off to team meetings.

Offensive players split into their units and meet with their respective area coaches in the locker room, while Tjeerdsma talks to the defense outside.

The units switch after a few minutes and meetings continue.

3 p.m.

Tjeerdsma meets with two of the officials for Sunday's game.

The coach listens intently but when he gets a chance to add anything he does.

"We do a shovel pass," Tjeerdsma said.

Tjeerdsma then explains to the officials that two weeks ago against Midwestern State that the officiating crew messed up the play.

In the game quarterback Josh Mathews shoveled the pass to wide receiver Kendall Wright but it Wright in the shoulder and fell to the ground

Since the shovel pass is a legal, forward pass it should have been whistled dead but Midwestern State picked it up and advanced the ball down the field. It was originally called a fumble but after some tempting from Tjeerdsma, who had also warned the crew of the play before the game, the call was changed.

He chuckles as he carries out the conversation.

3:25 p.m.

Special teams run onto the field, followed by the offense 10 minutes later and

see **ALL-ACCESS** on **A7**

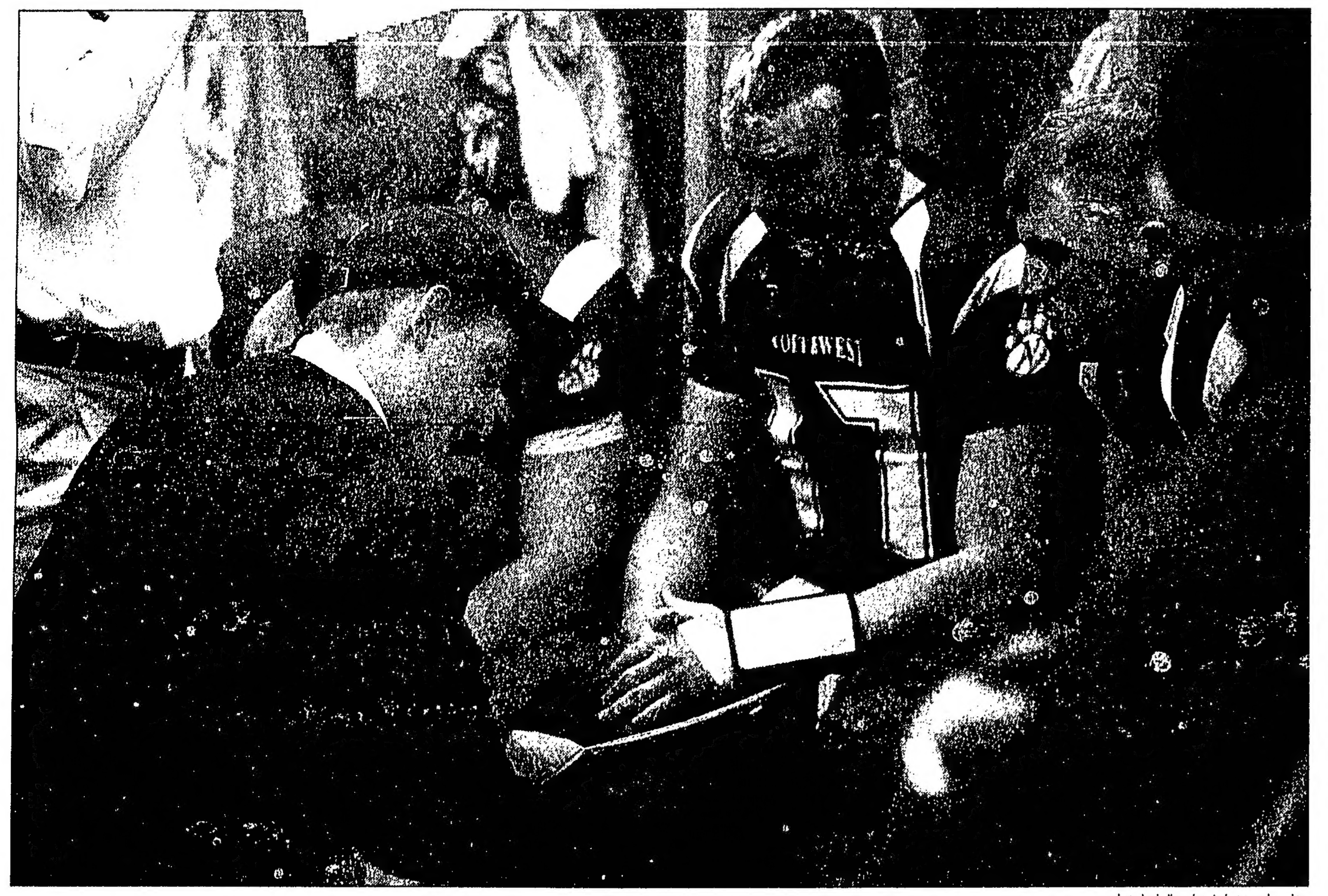

photo by kellie white | photography editor

GRADUATE ASSISTANT Josh Lamberson, left, goes over plays at halftime with the quarterbacks from left to right: Joel Osborn, Josh Mathews and Kyle Johnson. Lamberson has been in the playoffs before, as a player, most recently when he guided the Bearcats to the national championship last season.

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ALL-ACCESS: Players followed all day

continued from **A6**

then finally the defense.

Out in the middle in the field is Tjeerdsma as he talks to members of Bloomsburg's coaching staff.

Around 4 p.m., the team runs back into the locker room.

Despite kickoff being 30 minutes away as Tjeerdsma walks back in he shakes hands of fans and old friends.

4:10 p.m.

A needle dropping probably could be heard dropping in the Northwest locker room.

Players continue to move around, showing signs of anxiety.

Two TVs and one big projector in the locker room, begin to show a video.

Highlights of the 2006 playoffs come on the screen. Tjeerdsma's lecture to the referees at the Midwestern State is caught on tape and the team begins to laugh.

Then the words "One team stands between us" fill the screen and Bloomsburg and a picture of its mascot, the Huskie, follow.

Then Al Pacino takes over as a three-minute clip from the movie "Any Given Sunday" is on the screen. It's a segment from the movie when Pacino talks to the team before a game and tells them that they have to be willing to sacrifice themselves for the team.

The video ends and the room is extremely quiet again. All of a sudden someone yells out "Let's go back to 'Bama, Baby!"

The room goes silent again, as every now and then players yell.

One player says "he's tired of waiting." But a coach tells him that in five minutes it could be one of the best days of his career.

Tjeerdsma enters the room and the team circles around him as they fall on one knee. Safety Tyler Martin leads the team in prayer and then Tjeerdsma takes over.

"I really believe they got some doubts," he tells his team about Bloomsburg.

Tjeerdsma mentions tells his team they are 22-2 in the stadium since it was renovated in 2003 and they are "one step away" from their goal.

The team collapse around Tjeerdsma, hands in the air.

"Let's be physical all day!" Tjeerdsma yells.

The players disperse, running out of the locker room.

Linebacker Thomas Smith one of the last players in the locker room, kicks a panel and yells "Back to Bama."

Game-time—4:36 p.m.

"Are you serious?" backup quarterback Joel Osborn yells from the sideline.

Yep, that really did happen—Bloomsburg started the game with an onside kick and got it.

However, a sack by Ben Harness three plays later ends the drive and stops any momentum the Huskies might have had.

The onside kick seems to have gotten the defense more fired up.

Later in the drive, Xavier Omon runs in for a one-yard touchdown.

"Nice job," Tjeerdsma barks. "That a way X!"

The defense again gets the job done, with another three and out, but Bostwick wants some changes.

"Everytime you go out, go under... Hold in there," he tells a lineman.

Meanwhile, the offense is sputtering.

While the team kicks a field goal, they feel like they are settling.

"They're only playing one safety," offensive line coach Adam Dorrel tells the wide receivers. "They can't cover us."

Holtzclaw's emotions that he felt three hours before the game seem to be getting the best of him. He false starts and commits a holding penalty on the drive.

The first quarter ends with Northwest leading 10-0 and both teams add field goals to head into halftime with a 13-3 lead.

But in the locker room at halftime, the team isn't too satisfied.

"It's good thing we're not playing chess right now," Dorrel tells the offensive lineman. "They'd be winning...because it looked from behind that they got your asses."

And he adds one more important thing.

"No more field goals!"

Defensively, Bostwick tells his unit to be patient.

"D-middle guys, be slow on your reads," he says. "You've got to be more disciplined."

Tjeerdsma enters the room and tells his team they're close. He tells his special teams they are close to getting a blocked punt.

He reiterates what Dorrel said and says to keep trying to get in the end zone. He says be kicking field goals they've left Bloomsburg in the game too long.

"Thirty more minutes. Alabama's 30 minutes away," he says..

The team closes in on their coach again and his yelling his almost drowned it by the players shouting.

"We're going to be physical for 30 minutes," Tjeerdsma commands. "That's what we're all about. Let's go play 30 minutes of physical football."

Second Half

Tjeerdsma was on to something.

Bloomsburg begins the half with the ball but once again is force to punt. Diezeas Calbert gets ready on special teams.

The ball snaps, Calbert swim moves by the defender, jumps from 5-6 feet out and gets a hand on the ball but a foot in the mouth.

Though he blocked the ball, punter Kyle Ream's foot cut up his lip. Calbert is taken off the field to get three stitches in his bottom lip but comes back later.

"It was worth it," Calbert says.

Running back Sheldon Cook is found on the sideline and is told by coaches he will take Calbert's spot on special teams if they need him.

The block just leads to another field goal, which is followed by another for a 19-3 after three quarters.

Smith and defensive end Terry Bilbro hold up fingers signifying the start of the fourth quarter and that a return trip to Alabama—for the team, a first for those two guys—is 15 minutes away.

Less than two minutes into the quarter Omon jumps into the end zone for his second touchdown of the day.

Though the team is up by 23, the defense doesn't quit.

On 4th and 5 from Northwest's 28-yard line, cornerback Brandon Clayton breaks up a pass forcing Bloomsburg to turn the ball over. Secondary coach Tony Glover rushed out to the field, picks up Clayton and gives him a congratulatory slap on the pads.

With the game seemingly well in hand, Northwest goes for it on 4th and 11 and Raphael Robinson catches a 12-yard touchdown pass in the end zone with 2:45 remaining.

"I didn't want kick any more field goals," Tjeerdsma said later.

Robinson is greeted by teammates on the sideline including offensive lineman Tom Pestock.

"Ralph, you should act like you're on ESPN every week," Pestock tells Robinson.

Moments later Smith sets up Tjeerdsma and as he gets the triumphant Gatorade shower.

Bilbro holds up a sign that says "Even the BCS couldn't mess this up" and Omon carries a "'Bama Bound" sign.

As the clock hits zero, fans storm the field and the goalpost come down.

Players let loose, far different from the silence just hours ago in the locker room.

In the end Tjeerdsma stands in the middle of the field, a wide grin covering his face.

"I like night games once they start, this has just been a long week," he says later in the post-game press conference.

And a long day for that matter, but a historic one.

photo by kellie white | photography editor

OFFENSIVE LINE coach Adam Dorrel explains to the offensive line that they need to be more physical up front. He also tells his unit that he doesn't want to settle for any more field goals. The message seems to hit hom as the offense scores two touchdowns in the second half.

photo by kellie white | photography editor

WIDE RECEIVERS coach Travis Mason tells his players to make some adjustments in the second half. Mason's receivers finished with more than 250 receiving yards and a touchdown.

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'Hound changes into 'Cat

Cali Arnold
Assistant Sports Editor

Myles Burnsides didn't have to go far to chase his dreams.

A 2005 graduate at Maryville High School, Burnsides is now the starting strong safety for the Bearcats as a redshirt freshman.

A second-team all-state, first-team all-conference and first-team all-district selection in high school, Burnsides is tied for first in interceptions (3) and third in tackles (51) on a Northwest team that is making a return trip to Florence, Ala., to play for a national championship.

For the Maryville native, being a part of a team he watched while growing up is surreal.

"I remember in '99 when they tore down the field goal posts, and it's just kind of a dream come true to actually be in this situation now," Burnsides said.

Myles' father, Mark, played two years with the Bearcats at outside linebacker. Myles' said the opportunity to play in his hometown and being able to follow in his father's footsteps both influenced his decision to play for Northwest.

"It was a good opportunity with Northwest being close and getting looked at, I guess, out of high school by Northwest," Burnsides said. "It was just a good situation and I was lucky enough I came here."

Northwest head coach Mel Tjeerdsma liked the competitiveness and athleticism of Burnsides, which helped him gain a spot in the 2005 recruitment class.

After then-starter Chris Termini went down with an injury versus Emporia State earlier this season, Burnsides made an immediate impact. He has started every game since then, starting with the contest against Washburn.

"He came along a lot faster than we probably thought he would," Tjeerdsma said. "A lot of that is just because of his attitude, his competitiveness and his work ethic."

With a defense that starts six seniors, three juniors and a sophomore, Burnsides credits his older teammates for helping mold him into a starter.

"I just tried to make the most of it," Burnsides said. "The older guys just helped me out and made me more comfortable with it."

While Northwest faced Grand Valley State in the championship last season, Burnsides was not an active player on the roster. He knows, however, that while the team is a good one, the atmosphere of being in the championship will be "amazing". Playing in a playoff game away from Bearcat Stadium will also be new to Burnsides, who has been spoiled with three straight on his home field.

With losing much of the defense after Saturday's game to graduation, Burnsides and others will be counted on to take the 'Cats back to the championship next season.

"We'll lose a lot of great guys on defense—Harness, Kaiser, Waters, Thomas—and the secondary will lose a lot of guys, but hopefully the younger guys can step up next year," Burnsides said.

Tjeerdsma has faith in his young strong safety to help lead the 2007 team.

"He'll just get better; you can't beat experience," Tjeerdsma said. "He'll mature, he'll get stronger and faster. He has a chance to be a really great player."

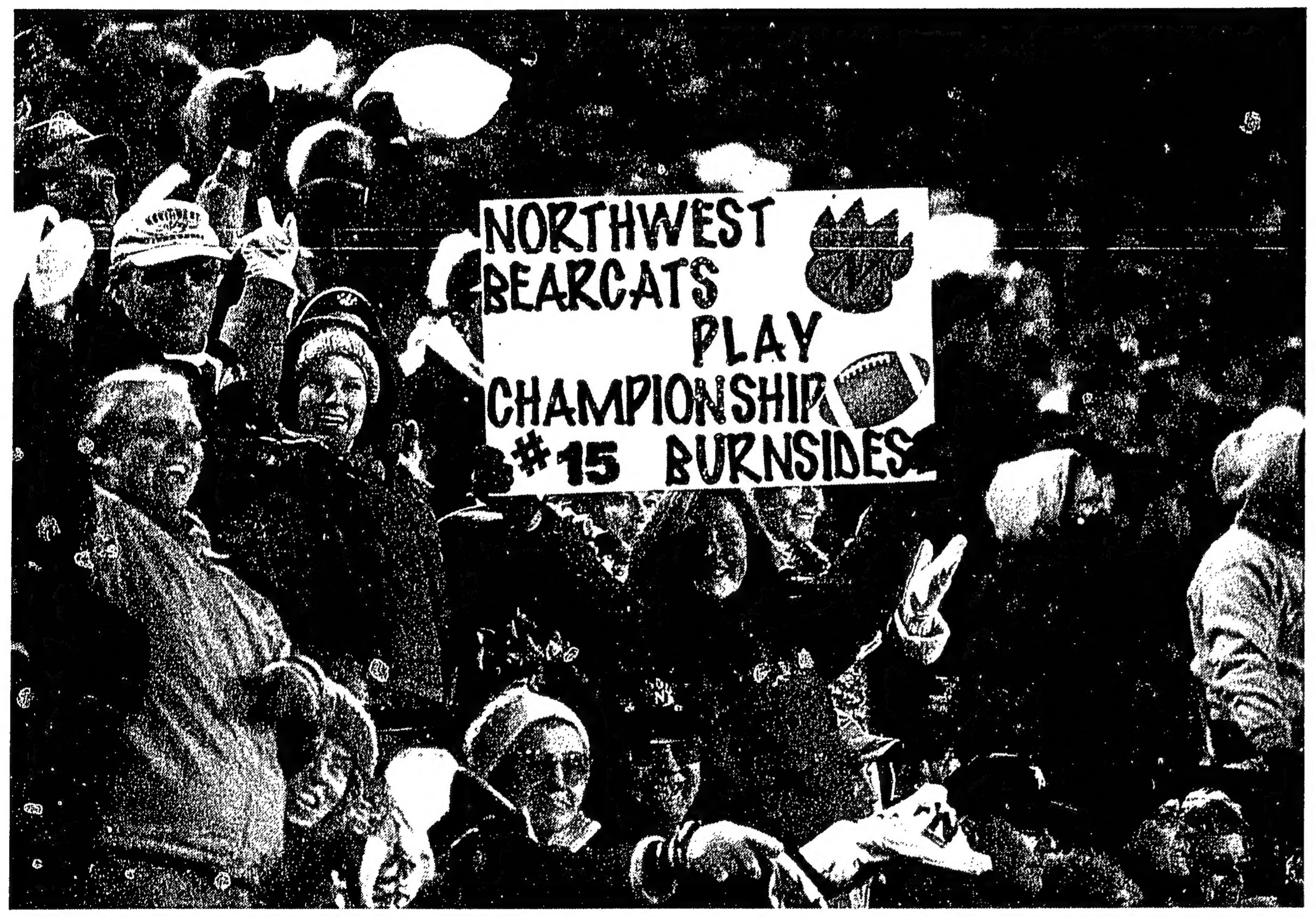

photo by kellie white | photography editor

REDSHIRT FRESHMAN Myles Burnsides made a quick impact on the Northwest team and its fans. After injuries plagued the strong safety position, Burnsides was given the chance to become a starter in just his first season of play.

BY NUMBERS

15 Burnsides' jersey number

3 Interceptions made this year, tied for first on team

7 Games started in the 14-game season

51 Tackles made this season, tied for third on team

National championship viewing parties

Several alumni chapters will be hosting watch parties for Saturday's game in the surrounding area and around the nation.

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720 West Ray Road, (Cooper & Ray NE Corner), Gilbert, Ariz., Game day contact: Stephen Bailey (480) 899-9804
Anyone wearing green and white will receive a free drink, compliments of Steve Bailey ('99) and Sara Wilson ('98).

Omaha, Neb. -Ice House
10920 Emmet St., Omaha, Neb.
The major streets at this location are approximately 114th and Maple Street for those who are not real familiar with Omaha.

Mt. Ayr, Iowa-Smith's Sports and Spirits

Kansas City, Mo.-810 Zone
4800 W. 119th St., (Northwest corner of 119th and Roe), Leawood, Kan.
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HARNESS talks the talk

photo by kellie white | photography editor

LINEBACKER BEN Harness has tried to keep his emotions in-check this season. Harness has built up a reputation and had been flagged many times for unsportsmanlike penalties.

Jerome Boettcher
Sports Editor

Ben Harness just wants one thing—to win.

"I just hate to lose," Harness said. "I just really, really hate to lose."

And it shows out on the field.

Over his past fours years as a linebacker at Northwest, the senior's built up a reputation and at times it hasn't always been a good one.

"I probably talked too much last year, and I've probably talked too much at times this year," Harness said. "But really as a whole, I feel like I'm keeping my mouth shut and talking with my pads."

Harness's emotions have gotten the best of him in the past.

At times last season his mouth got him in trouble as he was penalized for his actions with unsportsmanlike penalties.

This year his teammates elected him as a team captain, so Harness knew he would be looked upon to provide leadership.

"It's (unsportsmanlike penalties) just really something I want to cut out of my game," Harness said. "I don't want have to apologize to them or run for them anymore (at practice). I just got to stop doing them, it's just stupid on my part. I'm sure my teammates get frustrated."

But despite his mannerisms, his team knows he will make up for it.

"Of course, he plays with a passion, you don't have to watch a game very long to know that," Northwest coach Mel Tjeerdsma said. "Sometimes that gets him a bind, but sometimes you have to take the bad with the good. You have to bite your tongue a little bit once in awhile when he gets a penalty.

"All that just comes from a passion that he has for the game and to be successful."

The drive for success has showed throughout his career. Harness, a senior from Jefferson City, Mo., was recruited by Tjeerdsma and defensive coordinator Scott Bostwick heavily out of high school.

"We saw that passion," Tjeerdsma said.

Bostwick said that Harness actually turned down Division I-AA offers to come to Northwest. Harness said winning attracted him to Northwest.

And that's what he's been trying to do. This season, he's tied for third on the team for the most tackles with 51, he's recorded three sacks and he's broken up four passes.

He also was an unanimous pick as an All-MIAA first team selection and was named to the all-regional team for the Southwest region.

"I think what everyone wants this year is a national championship," Harness said. "They really could care less about the individual stuff. Because the individual stuff seems to be run by someone who doesn't know what they're talking about. Like how we didn't have any defensive linemen on the all-region team, we thought that was a complete sham. We don't know how that happened."

Winning a national championship has been a dream for Harness and he won't be satisfied unless he wins one.

He said getting so close last season but failing to win it all, left him upset.

"It was horrible, it was the worse feeling I've ever had," Harness said. "I think that feeling has carried us through this year. We don't want to have that feeling of being a loser again…It was an absolutely horrible feeling."

But if any good can come out of the loss, it's the motivation for this season not to let it happen again.

"That's been one of the driving forces, and that fire he has because he is so close with (defensive end) Ryan (Waters) and (nose guard) Kyle (Kaiser)…They're three peas in a pod. That passion that's been built between those three has effected our whole team."

Waters has lived with Harness the past three years and knows he can get emotional but said Harness' made an effort to relax more this year.

"He's definitely a lot more mellow during the games, it helps his concentration," Waters said. "…Everybody knew he was a workhorse and he's a hell of a player. Nobody's had a problem with it (his emotions)."

The difference between last year and this year for Harness is that he is calmer before games.

He said after the loss to Pittsburg State last season at Arrowhead Stadium, he realized he needed to change.

"Sometimes that got my way last year. Coach Bostwick talked to me about maybe not getting too pumped for games," Harness said. "I don't get pumped up for games anymore. We just go into them and we're not jacked up, we're just focused, we're just quiet and we're just there to get the job done."

As for the officials and the penalties, Harness has only kept the penalties to a minimum this season but sometimes his past gets in his way.

"Like Coach T tells me, my reputation with the officials from last year, sometimes I'll get flags when I feel like I shouldn't. But I'm cutting those out, they're not going to happen again."

Now just standing between him and a national championship is one team.

"We'd love to play Grand Valley, you don't get a second chance too many times," Harness said.

And this time he wants to come out a winner.

BY THE NUMBERS

31 Harness' jersey number

51 Tackles made this year, tied for third on team

12 Tackles for loss, tied for third on the team

3 Amount of sacks recorded this season

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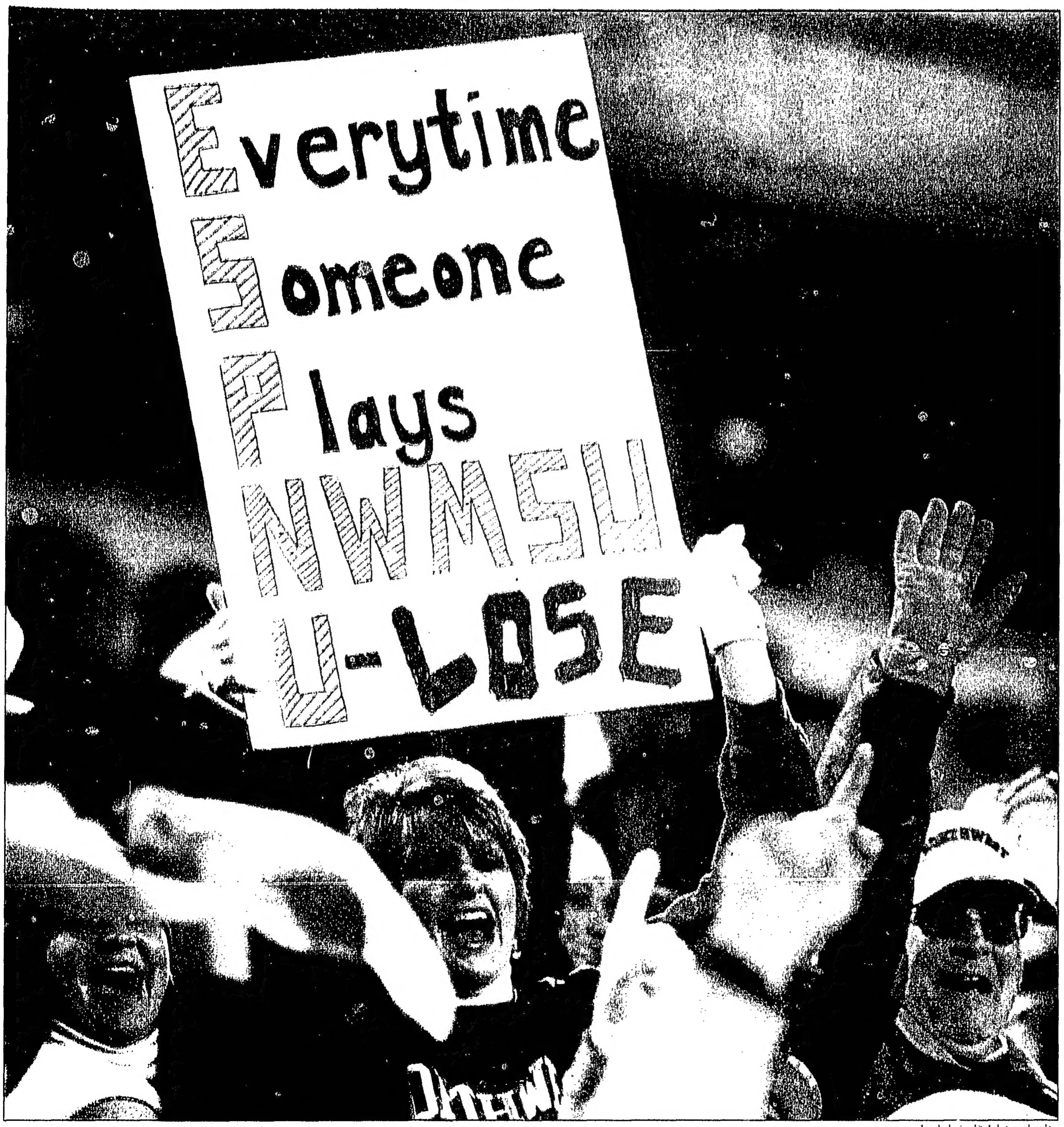

photo by kellie white | photography editor

THE 2006 SEASON BY THE NUMBERS

14

The amount of wins for the Bearcats, the most since 1999

2

The 'Cats national ranking throughout the whole season

3

The amount of shutouts, the most since 1964

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